Fantasia Magazine Recognizes

Decatur, GA City Council Member: Kecia Cunningham

A Heroine of Our Generation

Kecia Cunningham (KC) is sitting back enjoying a cafe latte and Fantasia Magazine (FM) is having a coffee of the day, she settles in and begins to unfold her evolvement as an educated, politically involved, confident, powerful black lesbian woman.

FM: Who is Kecia Cunningham?
I am a black, confident, powerful black woman. Yes, I am a lesbian! Yes, I am a black woman! Yes, I have a psychology degree! Yes, I work as a Loan Administration Officer. But, none of these things singularly define me, all of them define who and what I am.

Kecia Cunningham (1966 -)
Black! Confident! Invincible! Powerful!

FM: So, tell us about undergrad:
I had the choice of attending Stanford University, Wellsley College or Agnes Scott College. I initially chose Wellsley and it was the first time I had been around "*wealthy children and individuals, I mean really wealthy.*"

So much so, my mother had felt that I was becoming too full of myself. She told me this on one holiday break when I was back home.

FM: Why is that?
It was centered around a conversation where she told me that she did not like what I had become. I told her, rather boldly that, "*it was her perogative to feel that way.*"

> ***"I just want you all to know that I am very proud of Kecia and all that she has done. I am also fine with whatever she chooses to do, personally or professionally."***
>
> ***Mama Cunningham***
> ***Sunday prior to elections***

FM: So, what happened next?
She told me at the end of my sophomore year that I had to come home because I had gotten out of hand and she did not like the woman I was becoming. So, I returned home and enrolled at Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia where I did my junior and senior year.

FM: Were you out on campus?
No, not at first. At Wellsley, there was a group named WOLF (Wellsley Organization of Lesbians & Friends) and they were radical.

FM: How so?
The signs they posted around campus and their whole style of recruitment was a little too much for me at that time. So, I didn't decide that I was a lesbian until I attended Agnes Scott and after dating this one guy. He was a real jerk and I knew that night on July 4, 1986 that I did not want any part of settling down with a guy if they were creeps like this guy.

FM: So, tell us the story of coming out:
Well, I started dating women while there at Agnes Scott and became a part of an informal group called, "*The Enlightened Coalition.*" We were just a group of lesbians on campus who were out and comfortable with who we were.

FM: Did you date?
Yes, my senior year I dated this freshmen girl who was really cute. But, her parents found out about us and pulled her out of Agnes Scott, changed their phone number and called me, "*the work of the devil.*"

FM: How did you take that?
I felt hurt and knew I had lost a great girlfriend. I also felt sorry for her because her parents didn't feel she was a participant of what we did (date). They felt that I influenced her into the lesbian mindset/world.

FM: Were you involved on campus?
Yes, I was on the Student Government Honor Court and a part of the Mortar Board, an honorary society.

FM: What about outside of campus?
Actually, I joined the Atlanta Feminist Women's Chorus in 1988. This group was my lifeline to lesbians and the overall gay community. I was in this group from 1988 to 1998 and served as Secretary and Vice President during my time with this organization. It was a good place to meet girlfriends.

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FM: Tell us about how you came to be on the Decatur City Council:

First, I have to tell you that I have served in a number of leadership roles: *Board of Directors*, Decatur Development Authority; *Finance Committee*, Decatur Board of Education and while working in the government banking division of First National Bank of Atlanta (*now Wachovia*), I had the City of Decatur as a client.

I told her that there was three things she needed to know:

1. I don't know my next door neighbors.
2. I don't have a church home.
3. I am a lesbian

She said, "don't worry 'bout none of them, we can work with that."

It was November 1997 after Decatur's elections, I felt a little concerned about the composition of elected officers. So, it was then I received an epiphany that I had to do something.

Former Decatur Mayor Elizabeth Wilson [*a true heroine*] had a sister's cabinet meeting at her house.

FM: Did you attend?

No and I hear she had fried chicken, macaroni & cheese, collard greens and corn bread. I could have died after hearing the menu alone.

It was at this meeting that she formally announced that she would not run again. She asked those women present for likely candidates to fill her shoes and my name was suggested.

FM: So, what happened next?

I was summoned to her house, we sat in her dining room and she told me that I was her choice for replacement on Decatur's City Council. Once I pulled my bottom lip off the floor, I accepted.

I told her that there were **three things she needed to know**:

1. I don't know my next door neighbors.
2. I don't have a church home.
3. I am a lesbian

She said, "*don't worry 'bout none of them, we can work with that.*" So, I begin campaigning at the end of 1998, all of 1999 and was elected to the City Council January 3, 2000.

FM: Congratulations!

Thanks, you know I felt as if Mayor Wilson had passed me the baton and told me to run on.

FM: Tell us about your constituents:

Well, I work for older people in my district, the new families moving in as well as gays and lesbians. I don't champion a certain group's issues or concerns, I am here to serve those who elected me to office.

FM: When you put your finger on the pulse of District #2, what is the heartbeat you feel?

I feel as if people have a mindset that they are alone. I feel as if the older people who have tax problems feel they have to sell their homes as opposed to calling me so I can tap into the resources or organizations to help them.

I am driven by the passion to have Decatur remain what it is and continue to flourish. There is no need for neighbors to feel alone. It's that awesome feeling of knowing that if I don't make it, you're not going to make it. We need to work together.

FM: What drives you and makes you brave?

Sometimes being brave is just breathing. *[wow]* **Being brave is** respecting where and who we are as individuals. **Being brave is** raising our children and not relying on the church, school or any external institution to raise them. **Being brave is** telling little Janis in Smalltown, Georgia after she finds out that she is a lesbian that nobody can control what happens between your ears. **Being brave is** being the hero of my own book. **Being brave is not** being afraid to tell our children about sex or educating them about HIV/AIDS.

You know Michael Thurmond said on a program I was watching last night, "*I never want my fears to overcome my hopes and dreams.*" I feel the same way. I want my family, friends, Mama Cunningham and my constituents to be proud of me and what I have become as well as what I am doing. I want them to say, "***You know Kecia Cunningham is smart and she really gets the job done, some folks say she is a lesbian and that doesn't matter to me cause she gets the job done.***"

FM: Who stands in your corner cheering you on?

Lenny Lassater, she is an incredible partner of nine years. She always tells me that I am a wonderful woman and she is always cheering me on when I feel overwhelmed and can't get over to Church Street Coffee to get my cafe latte. *[hint, hint]*

FM: Any closing words for our readers?

Yes, be the hero of your story and live your life deliberately and with conscious thought. As the world continues to get smaller, we need to find ourselves working with one another, not against and I can't be what I should be until you be what you should be. Thank you for this interview and for allowing me to tell my story.

FM: You are truly welcome. (FM)